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23. (New) A process for the preparation of optically and chemically highly pure (*R*)- and (*S*)- α -hydroxycarboxylic acids, which consists essentially of recrystallizing impure (*R*)- and (*S*)- α -hydroxycarboxylic acids, prepared by acidic hydrolysis of the (*R*)- and (*S*)-cyanohydrins obtained by enzyme-catalyzed addition of a cyanide group to the corresponding aldehydes or ketones, in an aromatic hydrocarbon, optionally in the presence of a co-solvent, to form an organic phase and wherein the co-solvent increases the solubility of the hydroxycarboxylic acids in said organic phase, and obtaining

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concl'd

optically and chemically highly pure (*R*)- and (*S*)- α -hydroxycarboxylic acids having an optical purity of over 98%ee.
